

Having described the invention, I claim:

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1. An apparatus for helping to protect a vehicle occupant, said apparatus comprising:

an inflatable vehicle occupant protection device having a stored, deflated condition and an inflated condition for helping to protect a vehicle occupant;

an inflator for providing inflation fluid to inflate said protection device; and

a flap made of fabric material, said flap being stored with said protection device;

said flap being deployed by inflation of said protection device into a position engaging and covering a head of a vehicle occupant for guiding deployment of said protection device over the head of said vehicle occupant.

2. An apparatus as set forth in claim 1 for mounting on an instrument panel of a vehicle, the instrument panel having an upper portion extending generally rearward in the vehicle from the vehicle windshield and defining a deployment opening facing generally upward and rearward in the vehicle and having a forward edge portion and a rearward edge portion, said flap when deployed extending from the rearward edge portion of the deployment opening.

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3. An apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said protection device when inflated has a rearward-facing outer surface portion that is closest to the vehicle occupant when said protection device is inflated, said flap extending along said rearward-facing outer surface portion of said protection device when said protection device is inflated.

4. An apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said flap has first and second major side surfaces, said first major side surface of said flap having a higher coefficient of friction than said second major side surface of said flap, said first major side surface of said flap facing rearward toward the vehicle occupant when said protection device is inflated, said second major side surface of said flap facing forward and extending along a rearward-facing outer surface portion of said protection device when said protection device is inflated.

5. An apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said apparatus includes a housing in which said protection device in the deflated condition and said flap are stored.

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6. An apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said apparatus includes a housing in which said protection device is stored in the deflated condition, said flap being folded separately from and overlying said protection device when in the stored, deflated condition.

7. An apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said apparatus includes a housing in which said protection device is stored in the deflated condition, said flap being folded with said protection device when in the stored, deflated condition.

8. An apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said flap has opposite end portions, including a first end portion that is sewn to said protection device and a second end portion that is not sewn to said protection device, said second end portion of said flap being spaced farther from said inflator than said first end portion when said protection device is inflated and said flap is deployed.

9. An apparatus as set forth in claim 8 wherein said first end portion of said flap is sewn to said protection device with a permanent stitching section and

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said second end portion of said flap is sewn to said protection device with a releasable stitching section.

10. An apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said opposite end portions of said flap are sewn to said protection device and said flap has a rupturable portion located intermediate said end portions, said flap rupturing at said rupturable portion upon inflation of said air bag to enable said flap to move into a position engaging and covering a head of a vehicle occupant.

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